

TJC TOUCHSTONE

SPRING 1995



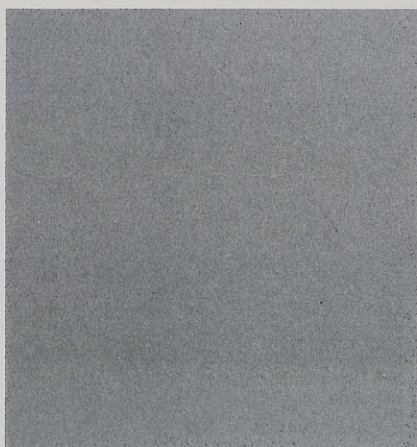
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FOUNTAIN THIEVES by Kevin Ray Harris

10th Anniversary Edition



FOREWORD

Talent. Webster's first definition of this word is "mental or physical ability." Thus, talent is not, by definition, restricted to only an infamous few such as Mozart, Shakespeare or Van Gogh. Talent is possessed by all. Even with a world population exceeding five billion, each person still has a special ability, a talent.

The TJC Touchstone is a tribute to talent. Through this publication we hope to recognize the vast reservoir of talent present right here on campus. Perhaps the artists represented in this magazine have not yet been recorded in the encyclopedias nor had their names up in lights, but they are still a viable and essential source of creative vitality worth recognizing.

Just as ancient tradesmen proved coin value with the use of touchstones, we hope to prove the value of our talents with our own TJC Touchstone.

We hope you enjoy the 1994-95 edition. Perhaps, as you go through these pages, you may awaken your own talent.

Stacy Fitzgerald, *Co-editor*

One of the most intimate of human actions is to share part of our souls. The TJC Touchstone is a vehicle that allows TJC students and faculty to do just that. My hope is that you will be enriched, enlightened and refreshed by this magazine and that next year you may be open to sharing part of your soul with us.

Jeff Palmer, *Co-editor*

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About the title:

A distinctive streak left on a black touchstone when rubbed with genuine silver or gold was a foolproof test which allowed ancient civilizations to trust using coins for trade. We trust that you, too, will find genuine distinctive elements of value in the TJC Touchstone.

Carolyn Hendon
 March, 1986



This edition of *Touchstone* is printed on recycled paper.

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NEW LIFE by Derrei Whitfield

ROSEBUD

by Merrill O. Cantrell

A light perfume, a delicate texture,
An unrevealed desire, to grow, to live,
So small, oft passed, when plucking blooms to give,
And yet, tomorrow's bloom it is for sure.

The bloom will spread abroad its essence pure,
The rare perfume a distant relative,
Its petals' daily blush is made captive,
By pearly drops of dew, the eye's pleasure.

Rosebud, your time has come to bloom out true,
To let your essence demonstrate its power,
To shade your airy blush a stronger hue,
To say one and all, "This is my hour.
Beware my thorns you who would be untrue,
To those I love I give my finest flower."

DREAMING

by Edna M. Hester

I went for a walk to the top of a high mountain
where there were green valleys and cool green forests.
I walked so high, I felt that I could touch the sky.
Oh, how beautiful the sky was that day—filled
with white fluffy clouds, condors and great bald eagles.
I stood quietly among the trees, looking down into the
valleys—the animals that I saw were so
wonderful and plentiful—deer, elks, wolves,
grizzly bears and even a golden cougar.
They were all there in that valley living in harmony.
The valley was filled with flowers, butterflies and
all kinds of bushes and trees.
The river flowing through was like a silver sunbeam.
Then I awoke and realized it had only been a dream.

Last night I took a long walk along the beach.
The ocean was as beautiful as I have imagined.
The beach was littered with shells that had been
washed ashore by the waves.
As I looked out across the great expanse of water,
I saw whales and dolphins playing among the waves.
As the moonlight glittered on the waves and on those
great and free sea creatures, I felt as if I
was in a magical time and place.
Then I awoke and realized it had only been a dream.

When I awoke, I rushed to my window to see what I could see.
All I saw were buildings and concrete everywhere.
There were no mountains or green forests to be seen.
The ocean was dirty and black—no pretty beaches to be seen;
they were littered with garbage instead of pretty shells.
The sky was gray with smog and haze—there were no
white clouds or birds to be seen.

They were all gone.
Those magnificent creatures that God had created.
They had all been destroyed by man for his concrete jungles.
I wonder what God thinks when he looks down and sees
what man has made of his creations.

Those wonderful creatures
That God created
They are all gone
Only now to be seen in dreams.
God forgive man for his destruction of earth.

FOREVER

by Merrill O. Cantrell

**Such
was the
thing
called
courtin'
in those
days.**

Elizabeth Howe Long sat in her rocking chair on her south-facing porch absorbing the early afternoon sun. Her crocheting lay in her lap. Her timeworn eyes and stiff fingers required the heaviest yarn and largest hook available. The doctor advised her to keep her hands busy.

Lizzie reached into the pocket of her apron and drew out a bottle and a bottle opener. She slid a curved metal wedge under the child-proof cap on her arthritis medicine and flipped it off. Medicated, she closed her eyes and let the sun run soft warm fingers over her body until the pain eased.



Elizabeth Howe smiled from her rocking chair at the tall nervous young cowboy sitting in the porch swing nearby. Jacob Long sat with the Howe family in church that morning and came home with them for dinner. Clearly uncomfortable in his Sunday-go-to-meetin'-clothes, he rocked raggedly in the swing propelled by one shiny boot, while Lizzie talked about everything in the world except love. Such was the thing called courtin' in those days.

Jake took out his old corn cob pipe and lit up. He expelled the smoke on the forward swing, so after a few minutes a small cloud built up between them. She ached to leave that old rocker and curl up beside Jake in the swing. She yearned to tell him that she loved him.

Mama and Papa sat in the living room not 10 feet away listening to every word and movement. Her imagination painted vivid pictures while thinking of what would happen if she did either of those things. Then a little devil in her said, "I'm gonna do it anyway."

The sound of a running horse caused both of them to look up. Lizzie thought, "YOU again, why don't you go back to Hackensack. It's disgraceful the way you

pushed yourself on our pew this morning and now you're interrupting my courtin'." I could hate you, Lucy Pendergrass." The horse stopped by the porch.

"Hi, Elizabeth. Hello, Jacob. I'm just trying out the new horse my Uncle Mack gave me. Want to come along?"

"That's a real fine filly, Lucy. Come on, Lizzie, let's go for a gallop."

"No, thank you!"

"Well, I'm goin' anyhow. I want to see how she runs."

"I'll bet you do," she thought, as he mounted and rode after Lucy. Mrs. Howe came to the door and asked about Jake.



Lizzie's eyes opened and the words came out unbidden, "He's gone." She barely glanced at the empty swing, then put away her bottle and bottle opener. Picking up the crocheting, the old woman made her way carefully inside to her bedroom.

The crocheting, yarn and hook fell carelessly on her sewing basket. Lizzie walked with a purpose now. She stopped in front of her dresser and opened a small ornately-carved chest. From it she took a tear-stained letter. A piece of red velvet ribbon fell as she unfolded the letter for the hundredth time.

My darling Liz,

It seems such a little thing to do, especially after fifty years of marriage, to tell you of a two-hour ride that went nowhere and did nothing except lay a guilt on me that I could never dispel. That you never once asked about it made it even more difficult to face. All I did with that girl was ride over the hill. She stopped to flirt and I told her I loved you.

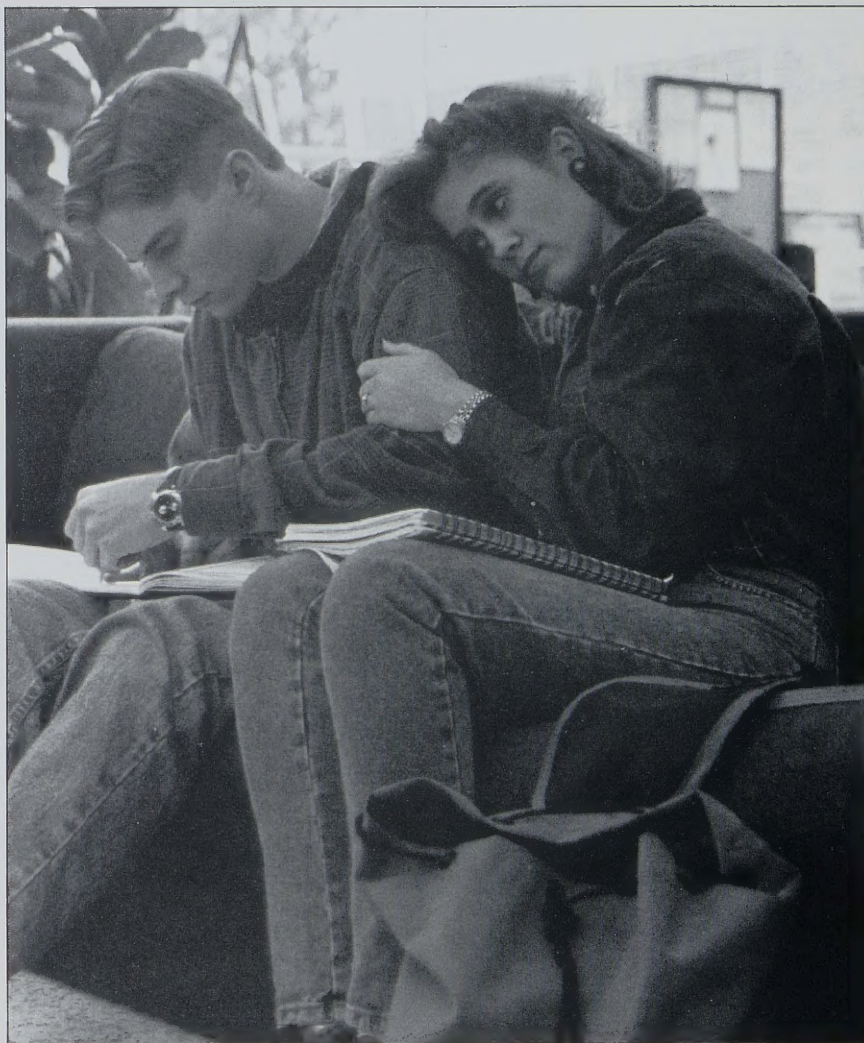
She said some ugly things and left. I felt so foolish and stupid, I just rode around a long time. I knew when I rode back and you saw me from your window, then turned away, that I had hurt you. If this letter seems foolish to you now, it cannot be more foolish than I felt that day. I have said it, my love, now I am free...

"Oh, Jacob, Jacob, my love, when you asked me to marry you the next week and vowed to love me forever, I forgave you anything and everything. That girl never entered my mind again. Jacob, I cried all night when I found you with this silly, foolish, wonderful letter and my hair ribbon under your hand."

"Do you know, Jacob, just how silly I am? I have wondered for years, what happened to my ribbon when you took it from my hair on our wedding night and let down my long, unruly curls. Thank you for returning it to me."

Elizabeth carefully folded the unsigned letter and the ribbon, then put them back in the box. She looked in the mirror and walked to the bathroom. Picking up a half-filled bottle of black hair dye, she threw it in the wastebasket, then spoke again to her departed love.

"Jacob, you teased me about my vanity when I put the color in my hair. It was for you my love. I only wanted to look like that young girl you vowed to love 'FOREVER'."



TOGETHER by Trevor Swanson

HAIR

by Rusty W. Mitchum

Oh dear, I've lost my hair,
Where it went to I do not know.
I used to have a lot of hair
A long, long time ago.

I always thought that hair spray
Would keep it in my head,
But I'd wake up in the morning
With hair all in my bed.

I used to use Head & Shoulders
To keep the flakes away,
But now I use Mop & Glow
So my head will shine all day.



SEEDS by Kevin R. Harris

I'M a WEED

by Paula Stovall

I'm a weed.
Beneath the trees
From sea to sea
And even beneath the sea
Growin' free.
That's me.

I'm a weed
Try to mow me,
Ah, what glee!
I'll make you sneeze
with my seed.
'Cause I'm a weed

I'm a weed.
Try to smother me
with concrete
Ha, Ha! you'll see
I'll crack it—and grow in between.
'Cause I'm a weed.

That's me.

EPIPHANIES OF EMILY BRONTË

by Judith A. Caswell

The tall, lithe Emily, rambling over the misty, purple-heathered moors,
Whistling a Bellini aria with her bull mastiff Keeper by her side.
The hazel-eyed Emily, reclining on the emerald green turf, playing like
a child with the tadpole in the brook,
Moralizing to her sisters Charlotte and Anne on the strong and the
weak, the brave, the cowardly.



On an Apollo-graced day, Emily, carefully cradling an injured linnet in
her hands,
Standing on a heathery knoll, her brown hair billowing in the breeze,
Smiling softly and happily when Ellen Nussey calls the three sisters
"the three suns."
On a stone chair close to the spring, Emily sketching her pet Merlin
hawk Hero or her two tame geese, Victoria and Adelaide.



Emily, lying on top of the barren crag Ponden Kirk where she imagines
the youthful Cathy and Heathcliff climbing in "Wuthering Heights."
Emily, exulting over every skylark's song, exploring every clump of
bilberry, bluebells or moss in every glen.
And Charlotte saying, "Out of a sullen hollow in a livid hillside, Emily's
mind can make an Eden."
Emily becoming so alive and free and hopeful on the moors that the
stationer of Haworth,
John Greenwood, says, as she descends a hill "in her rapture her
countenance is lit up with a divine light.
It appears holy, heavenly as if she has been holding converse with
Angels."



In Brussels at Zoe Heger's boarding school, Emily, reserved and
incapable of dissembling,
Simply and quietly responding to the tired, old jokes of her piano pupils
with, "I wish to be as God made me."
In the parsonage study, Emily, playing the Handel oratorios with Anne
on the upright piano.
In the kitchen, Emily, kneading the dough for her fine, light bread,
while she studies German out of an open book propped up before her.
In the dining room, Emily, sitting on the crimson rug reading Scott's
"Waverly" or Byron's "Childe Harold" with one hand on Keeper's
tawny, lionlike head.
In a dark corner at the bottom of the stairs, Emily, beating the ferocious
Keeper with her fists,
Then bathing his swollen eyes and jowl, because she fears that Tabby,
the housekeeper, will
Banish the dog outdoors for napping on the parsonage beds.



Emily tripping like Artemis to the bottom of the garden where the
Reverend Brontë teaches his
Daughter to accurately shoot his single-barreled pistol at a marked
target.
Emily, composing her poem "No Coward Soul Is Mine" in her narrow,
upstairs bedroom
With her rosewood writing desk on her knees and Keeper on the floor
at her feet.
Emily gazing out of this uncurtained, bedroom window at the presaging
picture of Death in the brown tombs surrounding Haworth Parish
Church.

The practical and dauntless Emily pouring pepper on the noses of
Keeper and another dog during a vicious fight,
Seizing Keeper by the neck and dragging him away, while several men
stand thunderstruck at her demise
Emily, offering water to a lost dog with a hanging head and a lolling
tongue,
Being bitten, dashing in the house, branding the wound with a red-hot
iron,
Not telling anyone about the incident until the danger of disease has
passed.
And Charlotte saying, "I think a certain harshness in her powerful and
peculiar character makes me
Cling to her more. Emily seems the nearest thing to my heart in this
world."



The compassionate Emily, the only one waiting late at night until her
brother Branwell staggers home from the Black Bull Hotel.



Emily, carrying him upstairs to bed, when he is too drunk to walk.
Emily, breaking down from grief after Branwell's funeral,
But still rising every day to feed the best bits of mutton to her dogs with
trembling hands and a rattling, hollow cough.



The stern, stoical Emily refusing to see a doctor, dying on the black
horsehair sofa
In the dining room at the age of thirty on December 19, 1848, three
month's after Branwell's death
Emily, traveling her last trip to the church in her narrow coffin,
Followed by the Reverend Brontë and Keeper who sits in the box-pew
with the family
And howls for weeks outside Emily's bedroom door where he sleeps
until the day of his death.
And the deeply sorrowing Charlotte saying the final epiphany, "I have
never seen her parallel in
Anything. Stronger than a man, simpler than a child, her nature stood
alone."



A COLD WINTER'S AFTERNOON

by Richard A. Carr

Live oaks nervously shiver while
the dark green winter grass dances
in the wind. The goat-weed, not long
for this world, waits at the fence
row. The luster is gone from last
summer's marigolds. The gray clouds,
though stern, hang low and add a
select balance to a cold winter's afternoon.

COUNTRY DOG

by Rusty W. Mitchum

I'd hate to be a City Dog
I'd just as soon be dead,
Lying in a small backyard
Just waiting to be fed.

They'd pet my head, I'd wag my tail
In hopes they'd want to play,
But they'd go back in their house alone
And in the yard I'd stay.

I'd rather be a Country Dog
Now there's the life for me,
Just running around, chasing squirrels
Living wild and free.

And when my friend came home each day
Feeling low and blue,
I'd jump on him and lick his face
Which means that I love you.

He'd hug my neck and call me names
We'd rattle to and fro,
Then he'd grab his gun or rod and reel
And off to play we'd go.

Then at night, I'd lay my head
And dream my happy dreams,
Of fish and squirrels, of birds and snakes,
Of woods and fields and streams.

Each night I'd thank the Lord above
For what he'd given me,
And for making me a Country Dog
What a Blessing that would be.

TO SLEEP

by Laura J. Daniels

When I lie down to sleep, to rest,
The day behind will take its toll;
There, in my bed, it makes no sense,
My mind becomes a twisted nest
Of squirming eels I can't control,
All sucking up my confidence;
Taking command they reconverse,
Contorting every thought, but worse,
The ones I spoke, in chorus song,
A broken record, "You were wrong!"

I gather up my rumpled skin
And spread it out to rest again.
As I go drifting, falling deep,
I hear a drip... I cannot sleep!

THE REAL ME

by Stephen B. Holcombe

if you were blind
and could not see
you could love the real me
fat or small
short or tall
this should not matter at all
if you were blind

but you're lucky
you can see
so why bother with someone like me?
because I'm blind
but I can see



DAISY GOODTRIP by Margarita Buenaventura

MILD SCHIZOPHRENIA

by Darren C. Lytle

With only my thoughts to keep me company, my mind wanders about. I am making realizations that I will soon forget; wishing for something I believe will never be obtained. My prison is my own mind, no life or spontaneity, only myself. I revere company, and yet I should covet it, to stave misery. Hell was born inside my skull and there it lives and thrives. It ticks my pride and emotion away. I crave brief glimpses of pain or

pleasure, but no emotion has a permanent effect. I become drawn back into my solitude after the euphoria of emotion vanishes. Thoughts of love and happiness occur in my hell but my pain is only worsened when I open my eyes and there is no happiness before me. I attempt to make a future of hope with new friendships, but after the initial spark of life has vanished I find myself back with only me. Many times I have

thought to seek help, as I know everyone cannot feel this constant agony. When being probed by an outside force, I form into a newer and happier person while being investigated. No one has stated that I have an illness, either for fear I will not return to their place of business, or because my act is believable.

I tell my closest friends of my fear and agony but they offer me no resolution. They sit and watch

in awe as I disclose my hell to them in minute detail. They must think for themselves, no one can just drift through life without a clue to their being. The mystery of their lives must be a parallel of oddity of my life to them.

I have searched in despair for a group of people like myself, as we all do when we find ourselves alone but I have found no one like me. I do not feel crazy, I just do not feel. I think of my death and sometimes I wish to kill myself, but suicide is a common thought. I look at the world and all I see is insanity. Murder, petty crimes, but, most of all, self insubordination. "Wake up people," I wish to say as I walk through the streets. He is not being true to his wife, she is thinking about how to manipulate her co-workers, he is preparing to rape, he is yearning to get home to make love to his daughter before his wife comes home.

I remember a time when I believed people were honest, or at least tried to be, but after I was two, I realized different. No special sin took place; simply a thought occurred, and after gathering sufficient evidence I opened my eyes and the clouds of youth were lifted. Quite a discovery it seems for a two-year-old, but if everyone thought back they would have a similar idea. Then as the mysteries and wonders of life wear thin in pre-teen years, the world is never the same place. As a teen, one realizes they have discovered the world. After the amazement of it fades, they then ask themselves, "What the hell are we going to do with it?" They then find a niche, and the world is a treasure for the taking. Some people believe this for the rest of their lives, but most find difficulty in taking the treasure and give up. Me? Well, I have had to give up my treasure. Now the only thing I have of my own is my thoughts, so, of course, I despise them.

THE REALITY BALL

by Albert A. Freeman

I want to run from this place.
There is the rasping sigh of the respirator.
Beep-beep-beep of the pulse monitor.
And the artificial breathing
of an old man.

The walls here are gray.
The air here is gray.
The sound here
is gray.

No thing and no body moves.
A ball of fear forms in my gut.
This is reality and no silly melodramatic dream of youth could
ever have prepared me for this.
I speak the lies that everyone else does.
"You're going to be all right..."
"You've got good doctors here..."

The words burn in my throat
emerging only as
inarticulate whispers.

I want to run from this place, to get as far from this reality as possible.
I turn, a nurse.
I turn, my mother.
Another turn, my Nana.
Another, my aunt.
Another, my grandfather.

I shoulder my way past Mother and make
three steps before the man with a long knife cuts down
the wall.

He cuts the pain from my body.
First, through my heart, then my arms and legs, my groin,
my throat, my head.

All that hate and love and anger and joy and agony and ecstasy
come heaving out in
great
gasping
sobs.

I crush my eyes closed to shut out the world and there is no
sound in that
red-gray darkness behind my eyelids.

Just me
and my grandfather
and the knives
and the
silence.

FRIENDS 'TIL THE END

by Teresa A. Lanier

**A tall,
slender
man
threw a
large,
dark
shadow
over him.**

The thin white sheet covered the frail body of an elderly man. His small, pale face covered with a road map of wrinkles and large crevices emerged from under the top of the sheet. Large, bulging eyes anxiously watched his surroundings for a movement in the hospital room, but the room remained quiet, except for the pulsating heart monitor. His eyes carefully searched over the room and he noticed the empty chair beside his bed where visitors were supposed to comfort him. *They're coming*, he thought. A bright red glare radiated from the closet and he squinted his eyes to focus on the object. *Oh yes, my silk robe*. He grinned, remembering how charmingly handsome he thought he looked in the robe.

Hours passed by, and Bob still waited for the many visitors to come to comfort him, yet the cold room remained empty. The small window that had provided sunlight earlier now portrayed a black mass of darkness. Bob's doctor had told him years earlier that his heart had weakened severely and he had only a few years to live. "Make amends with loved ones," the doctor said. *Why should I, he thought, they'll be there when I need them*. The small lamp on the night stand displayed shadows that formed on the empty, white wall directly in front of Bob's bed. Bob closed his eyes now and concentrated on each breath that he took because the room's air seemed heavier. Thoughts of people that once loved him came rushing back to his memory, opening the gate that had been locked for so long. *My ex-wife could not hold a grudge forever could she? Or my daughter? Surely as I lie on my last bed, my daughter could forgive everything that I have done wrong. The birthdays, Christmases, graduations I've missed could not overshadow the fact that I'm her father*. A cold sweat broke out over his body when he began to think that maybe he was wrong. *Nonsense!* His aged hands trembled

with fear and he tried to think about something more pleasant, but the absence of any family when he was on the verge of death scared him. Tears formed in his large swollen, yellow eyes and slowly slid down his face.

Suddenly he heard something and he quickly wiped away the warm water from his eyes. A tall, slender man threw a large, dark shadow over him. *At last*, thought Bob, *someone has come to visit me*.

"Hello, my dear friend, Bob." The man's voice disturbed the serenity of the room.

"I'm sorry, sir, I'm afraid my age has not only taken over my body, but also my mind as well. I can't..." Bob squinted his eyes over the man's figure, "I can't seem to recall who you are. Maybe if you step closer to the light."

"Oh, you know me. Of course you do. You know me quite well." The tall man grinned as he stepped beside the small night stand.

Bob gasped as he observed the unusual features of the towering man that was mischievously smiling at him with large yellow teeth and thin pale lips. "No sir, I don't think I know you."

"Bobby, you're hurting my feelings," the man declared and burst into hideous laughter. Bob closed his eyes shut and grimaced at the awful, shattering laughter of the man.

"Why are you laughing? Who are you?"

Finally the stranger's laughter subsided and he now glared at Bob with intensity. "Well, Bobby, you and I are best friends. Don't you remember? You couldn't have forgotten me?" The stranger that dressed in a pinstripe suit from the 1940's, ran his fingers through his slicked black hair and slowly smiled again.

"I don't think I have ever been friends with someone like you, nor will I ever be," Bob said with anger. "Now get out. You must have the wrong room. My family will be here any minute to visit

me." The stranger stood still over him, amazed that such a small elderly man would dare to talk to him with such ferocity. "Get out, I said! The psychiatric ward is on the eighth floor!"

"You must be kidding me," the tall man whispered, lowering his head close to Bob's large ears. The rancid odor which drifted from the stranger's mouth disgusted Bob and he turned his head away from the man's face. "Don't be rude to me, my dear friend. I have come to visit you. I think you do know me. We're going to have a long time to get to know each other again, if you have truly forgotten me. But I think you do remember me. Let me try to refresh your memory, Bobby." The man sat down in the empty chair beside Bob's bed and comfortably relaxed.

"What's your name?" Bob demanded.

"Hmm. You still don't remember me, huh. I'm your old friend Nick."

"It doesn't ring any bells."

"Bobby, Bobby! We've been friends since your childhood. Remember the time we put that snake in our second grade teacher's desk? Mrs. Craddock? Oh what a deliciously good woman. We scared the hell out of her," Nick laughed, "didn't we?"

Bob stared at Nick with disbelief. "I thought I was alone when I did that."

"Oh, go ahead, take all the credit. Forget your friends." Waiting for a reply from Bob, Nick looked down at the shiny scrubbed white floors of the hospital room.

"So, I knew you from elementary school?" Bob questioned.

"Want to know more?" Nick quickly looked up at Bob, mischievously smiling, scooting his chair closer to the bed. "Remember the time in junior high when we cheated our way through Mr. Lloydon's science? Always finding a way to make that A. Nobody suspected a thing. In high school..." Nick smiled, "high

school was the best. The grades, the games, the girls ... oh, we had a blast."

"I still don't remember you." Nick's breath filled the room with a putrid smell making it even harder for Bob to breathe.

"But we weren't only friends in school, Bobby. Friends after high school and in college, too. Our relationship dwindled a little when you fell in love with Mary. Love is such a disgusting thing sometimes, huh? You came to find that out. Always having to be faithful and truthful." Nick curled his nose in repulsion. "We showed her, though, when we captured that pretty little dolly, Suzie, at the truck stop. Hmm. She was sizzling hot. Still is." Hysterical laughter once again filled the room.

"What are you talking about? Mary was the best thing that ever happened to me. Suzie was a mistake. A big mistake." Bob's chest rose quickly up and down as he defended his actions. "How do you know these things?"

"I'm your friend, remember? I was Suzie's friend too...well, until she turned to someone higher up than me. She was fun, though, wasn't she? How's your daughter Maggie? Oh, that's right, you never visit her. Never even call her. She's a perfect little angel, too bad."

"Listen, Nick, or whoever the hell you are..."

"Oh, listen! Bobby is making a joke."

"Get out! Get out!" The heart monitor rhythmically beating began to throb harder. The sheet that covered Bob now lay over him drenched with sweat and his thin body could be seen shaking underneath.

"Okeydokey," Nick said as he stood up. His tall, lanky body stretched a dark shadow over Bob. He turned his back toward the elderly man and stepped forward to begin to walk toward the door. Suddenly he turned around and laughed, "But I'm not going

without my dear, dear friend, Bobby."

"What?"

"Oh, come on, Bobby, we've been friends much too long to part like this."

Bob's breathing started to become irregular and he clutched his chest. "Please, please get a nurse or a doctor."

"How 'bout a nurse? They're more fun," Nick laughed at his own joke. "Hey, now I'm the funny man."

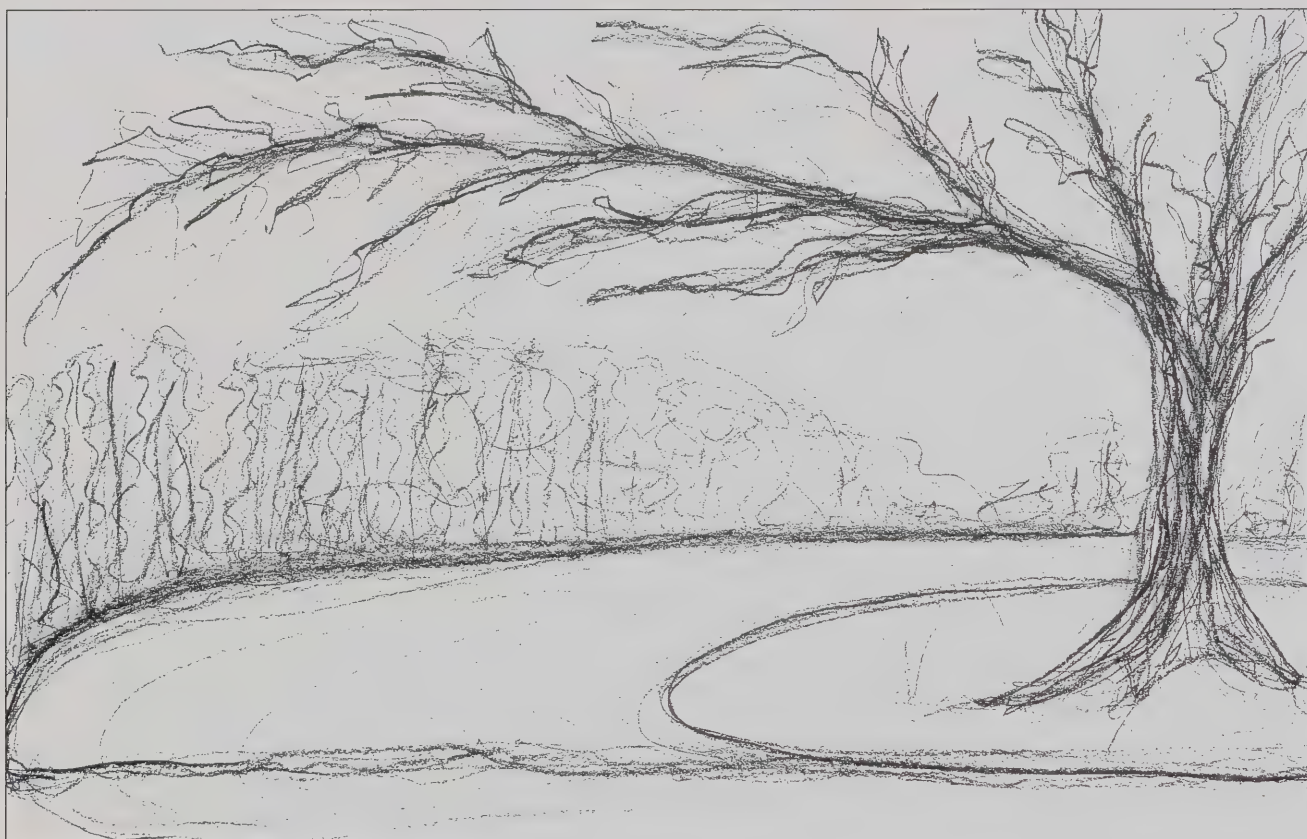
Bob fumbled around in his bed, desperately trying to find the button to press to call a nurse. Nick watched with amusement.

"Hey, Bobby. Look around. You're finally going to get some visitors. We can have a party. A going away party." Nick roared with laughter. "I just crack myself up!" His face slowly became stern as he came closer to Bob, "I guess I'm going to get the last laugh."

Black ghastly figures began to slowly emerge around Bob's hospital bed. "No...no!" Bob screamed with terror. His body felt as if it was being tugged downward.

"Hey, lighten up, Bobby. These are your friends. You can't turn your back on them now. It's too late. We'll have loads of fun, just like we used to... a devilish good time," he snickered. "Friends 'til the end."

Suddenly a nurse entered the room. Nick and his fiendish friends disappeared as she raised the curtains to free the morning light. An ear-piercing humming sound came from the heart monitor and a motionless flat line appeared on the screen. The nurse turned off the heart monitor and disconnected it from Bob's chest. Then she pulled the extra dry sheet that lay at the end of his bed over his legs and stomach, but paused suddenly, to emotionlessly place the palm of her hand over his face, closing his eyes, not noticing the terror that was still alive in them.



SCRIBBLED LANDSCAPE by Karin S. Miller

OUR INNOCENCE

by Ben Skinner

A heinous act, a dastardly deed
The press-born criminal did not concede...

Acrid, rancid colors abound
Humanity not here to be found
Destroyed by greed of power born
So on this day we all mourn
The death of our innocence.

With our useless energies spent
It is too late for us to repent
Life's naïveté leached away
I do not feel proud to be alive today

Egos bolstered, pockets fattened
With the world unsure of what happened
The price of unbridled greed
The bastard sun would not concede
And so was the death of our innocence.

OL' BLUE

by Rusty W. Mitchum

Me and my friend Gus
Went down to the fishin' hole.
We'd dug us up some fat ol' worms
And cut some green cane poles.

We hadn't been there no time
Till Gus, he got a bite,
His cork started bobbin'
And clean went out of sight.

He dug both his heels in
When he set the hook,
But the fish, he pulled right back
And across that hole he took.

"Help me! Help me!" cried ol' Gus
"I think I've caught ol' Blue."
We'd heard some tales about this fish
But didn't think them true.

So I grabbed ol' Gus by the belt
And held on best I could,
But Blue, he pulled my friend Gus in,
There with his pants I stood.

Blue pulled ol' Gus across that hole
And back toward me twice,
"Let go!" I yelled to my friend Gus
But he didn't take my advice.

Then they went down away
And under a low hung limb,
It conked Gus on the head
And away ol' Blue did swim.

I swam and got my friend Gus out
And got his clothes back on,
And when he finally did come to
All he'd do was groan.

And ol' Blue is probably with his friends
Telling about his day,
"You should have seen the one I caught
But I let him get away."



HERE AND THERE by Suzanne Loudamy

THE QUILT

by Suzanne Loudamy

I find great comfort here
Wrapped in the quilt of my heritage.
I am the quilt formed from
The pieces of my past generations.
I am also a vital piece of the quilts
I call Bethany and Sarah.
My beloved daughters.
Please God,
Bind them with strong threads,
That as they grow,
They will remain steadfast and true.



PUMP by Ricky C. Martinez

RUST

by Johanna R. Bailey

I am so confused,
I don't know what to do.
Chains on my wrists and ankles
Pulling me different directions.
I want to curl up in a ball,
Lie on the floor,
Cry until my tears are gone.
I can't
I can't see.
I can't move.
All that's moving me are these awful chains,
Rusted and caked with the blood
Of the last person
Who was held captive
By indecision.

LOST

by Rina W. Tutt

A small child stands in the shadows,
cold blood, heart pumping fear,
too scared to move away or cry,
nothing but strangers near.

Angry expressions imprinted on his soul,
hostile images reflect in his eyes.

A child that shivers when no wind blows,
no place for this child to hide.

To find silence he turns his soul within,
closing the door to emotions held tight.

This child does not live on the street
but goes to a family each night.

There are people who share his living space,
but still the child is alone.

There is no time to acknowledge his life,
for he lives in a house not a home.



BRADLEY by Sheila K. Rosamond

FADE TO GREY

by Johanna R. Bailey

Everything fades so fast.

Pictures,

Memories,

Your face

When I try to remember it at night

Before I fall asleep

So I can dream

Of you.

Thoughts,

Plans,

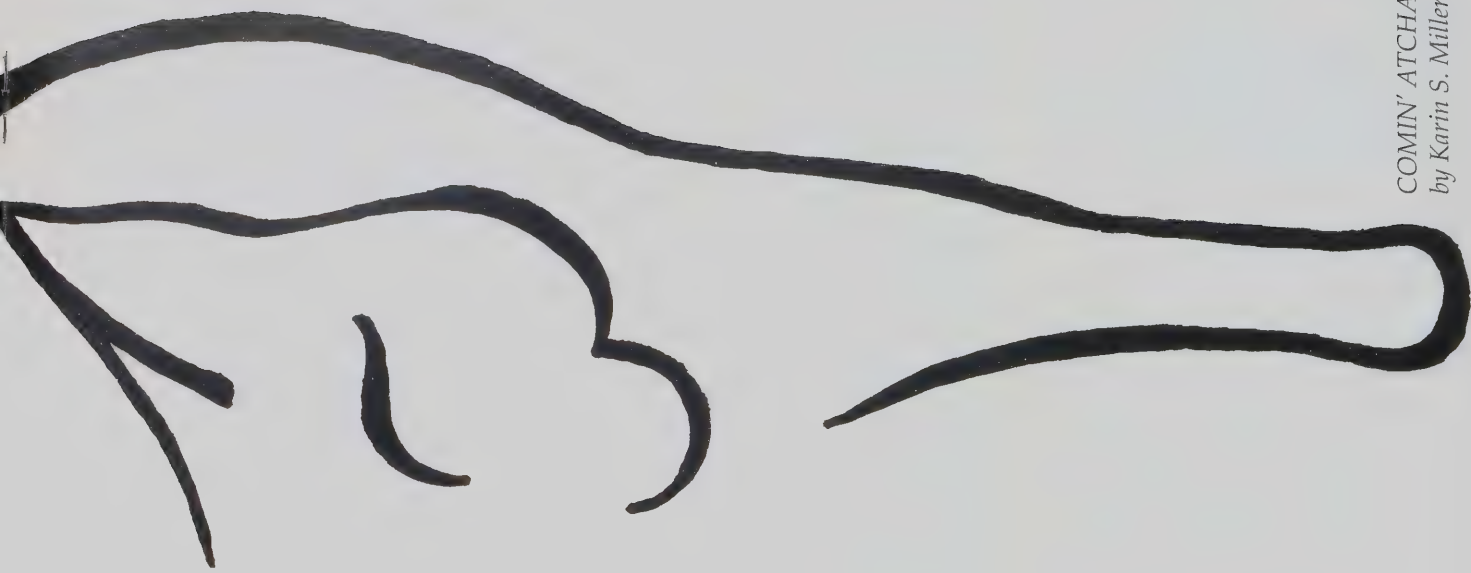
Love,

Time.

It all fades into blackness,



Greyness
Nondescript.
What was once so vivid
Now
Dull.
I try to recall
Everything,
Anything.
It all melds into one
Blurry,
Painful
Recollection
Of nothing
That was once something.



COMIN' ATCHA'
by Karin S. Miller

THE WALKER

by Paula L. Stovall

**He was
Jay
Movine,
Last Man
on the
sphere
called
Earth,**

Raining again today. It had rained every day this month. Not a hard torrential rain that beat down on the heads of the empty buildings, with lightning whose cry was heard beneath their feet but rather a steady dripping that seemed more as if the drops were suspended in the air than falling down to touch the muddy earth. The kind of rain that still could have boasted of a bird in flight a constant wetness in the air that a solitary walker breathed in.

No one but the walker could have said for sure whether it was a man or a woman inside the slippery gray raincoat, the floppy hat pulled low around the face and the oversized galoshes that clomped through the mud and patches of bent grass along the road. Anonymity was walking in the rain.

Only the walker wasn't anonymous. He had a name, a face. He was Jay Movine, Last Man on the sphere called Earth, the planet that now drifted through the infinite solar system without the help or hindrance of the species known only to the lone walker as man.

Jay loved the title he had made up for himself. He was always giving himself new names. After all, he was an actor, and an actor had many faces, many identities. The Last Man on Earth. It rang of the old saying women would use when they were being coy with him. But now, when he really was the last man, there was no woman for him to entice into wedlock. He was Adam, without Eve. The world was his setting, only it wasn't paradise. All was his—his alone. He hated it, and yet he walked on, acting a role in an all too real drama.

It didn't matter where he walked or how he walked or why he was even walking. No one was there to witness. They were all gone away.

They left when the rain came. The rain itself wasn't what made them leave. The human race had

seen a million years and rain had been a part of each of those years. No, it wasn't the rain, but what the rain brought with it.

He laughed. A laugh that choked in the height of its hysteria and died into a heeing that rived his body and made his eyes stare wide, as though he couldn't see enough of the scene around him. Everywhere he went was the same.

Wet. Wet. Wet. Oh, if only it was just wet, but it was much more. The rain, the horrid rain, was making all the colors of everything it fell upon run together like a watercolor painting with too much water. The buildings, the trees, the ground, the cars, the sky—even the raincoat he was wearing were fading, mixing, becoming one horrid color. White.

In his balmy, distracted mind Jay believed that some force was purifying his round enigma by bleeding all the harlot colors out of its evil skin, leaving it pure, virginal, without a blemish to dissipate its chastity. Yet the Titan, bent upon purging the foul earth, had overlooked one small stain: Jay Movine.

Why?

Maybe the Titan was God Almighty destroying the Earth as he had done before. Maybe. But hadn't he read somewhere that God promised never again to destroy the Earth with water? He couldn't remember.

"But it's not rain!" screamed the mouth in the screwed-up face that lifted itself to the Heavens, "It's not *just* rain!"

Where the water fell upon his skin Jay was painted white, almost colorless, except for the hideous folds and creases that were imbricated from its touch. Falling into his open mouth, he swallowed the rain. If there had been a mirror for him to look into, Jay would have laughed to see how closely he resembled the white mask of comedy that he had portrayed so many times in his life. He remembered all too well the world of

theater he had belonged to when there had been a world. He recalled the comic scenes when his co-actor would throw a bucket of paint over his head, and how easy it was to simply change the scenes afterwards. Why couldn't he change this scene?

"Because," he thought, "this is no scene in a movie. This is hell."

Jay was on his knees, groveling in the mud. Pressing his hands into its boggy depths, he brought a handful up to his face. Snorting through his nose, he realized that even the mud was white.

"If I cannot be Adam, then I will be Noah," he cried to the Titan.

Adventurous Noah. Noah who led his family and all the animals to a beautiful new world that awaited them.

"I could be a good Noah. Please, let me be Noah!" But he had no

family. He had no animals. Alone in a world of blinding white, his role-playing could not help him escape any longer.

In his suffering, Jay would be strong. His world, his clothes, his skin might all be subject to the same oppressive force, but there was one thing that still belonged to Jay Movine. His memory. The pitiless Titan had erased everything that his memories were made from, but it could not whitewash his brain—the memory book of the late Mother Earth.

In his very defeat, Jay had triumphed over the Titan. And he would not forget, for it was all that was left to him.

Jay lived in a world of sanitary white where he was the only defacement, the only mar in its otherwise flawless glory. *He was the mistake.*

Somewhere, there might be others like him that the Titan had overlooked. He had to keep walking. He had to find someone, anyone—or go mad.

So he kept walking. In the never-ending fall of water he walked. In his white raincoat and hat he walked and searched and never found.

He knew himself as Jay Movine: Last Man on Earth, yet the others—yes, there were others—knew him as number 203, second floor, hopeless schizophrenic. Two names, two titles. One so real that it could not enter Jay's mind as a possibility, and the other so unreal that it had become his reality.

What name do we choose to call him? Which title would be kindest to his tortured presence? Let us be merciful and remember him in our hearts simply as The Walker.

MOUSING

by Noamie Byrum

Hickory dickory dock

I did my time
I read my lines

Tapping out the beat
Holding my breath
Waiting for the baton to point my way
I did my time

The mouse ran up the clock
The clock struck one
The mouse ran down

In the silence of the almost
In the hope of the maybe so
In the yearning of the if

Hickory dickory dock

LOVE BEATS THE DEMON

by Ben Skinner

In her eyes I see a flame - Flickering, growing larger and stronger as each day passes - The more I learn the more I am drawn inward - Inward into a downward spiral of emotions - The stinging bite of love and the warm glowing comfort of security grow stronger - I grasp at nothing and am left wanting more - I thrive on the explosive emotions - Those that spark the soul and inflame the heart - They always seemed most attractive - Push until they snap - Reactions scream out at me - I take them in - Beautifully pure hatred - Chaotic, unbridled and raging I take them in - The sight of realization lingers - The idea that these emotions were dormant - That someone could awaken these quietly hidden emotions - That I have caused a disgusting thought to be resurrected - To be brought into the light and exposed for all to see - I ask the question - She is still stunned, reeling in discomfort - A tear slowly rolls the length of her cheek - The flame has now gone - It burned itself out - No longer does she allow it to enter her - Penetrate her mind and soul - Embracing me she asks the question - I gently nod and answer - Relieved and revived she comprehends - Understanding - I gently kiss her salty, tear-soaked lips - Caressing ever so gently the cheek - Her kiss - More passionately now - Her kiss - I take her in with the kiss - I become one with the spirit and soul - I understand her fears - Knowing where the flame went I return it - Rekindling the smothered embers - They burst to life with raging reborn glory - All is well - Life is returned - The dead reborn - The lost found - The worried eased - Love beat the demon - All is well.

THE LAST GOOD-BYE

by Cheryl L. Angle

Listen to the rain ...
An endless dismal rain
Falling on a cold gray afternoon,
As the mourners bow and weep
In a somber dim lit room.

Listen to the rain ...
The trees forever barren,
The sun, it shines no more.
The earth stands still, defeated
with tears upon her floor.

Listen to the rain ...
The clouds, their silver lining lost,
The warmth of spring has died.
The flowers forever faded now,
And all the angels cried.

Listen to the rain ...

BACKWARD

by Ivy O. Weaver

The leaves fall away around me and are forgotten. I wrote that as a young man, before so many autumn years. Today they fall slowly, and are remembered vividly. Now I see that I really forgot nothing, only put remembrance off until I needed it. Today I harvest my youth in memory, picking vernal buds to suspend my decline. This late in life I know it does me no good to recall my climb through it, not now as my foothold crumbles under me. But comfort holds around me as I do, and in a fading world, that peace is all I seek.

A thousand some-odd goals began before me. Now all are behind—complete or not. A million momentous decisions have faced me throughout a life where

few have left their mark. My memoirs would be considered uneventful but to me. I have passed in and out of the doors I found, stumbled down countless corridors of gold and gray, seen

**countless
dreams
fade away
into the
light of
common
days.**

countless dreams fade away into the light of common days. The corridor I approach these days is one I cannot escape by rolling over and burying my face in the pillow.

I cannot simply find a way around it or lose myself in reflections of others as I have so often done. The trip home is upon me, and I am almost ready to go, for I have laid my treasures there, or done my best to.

To me, regret is a dangerous foe. My days are too short now to think of could-haves and should-haves. Haves and dids please me more. I thank the heavens when every day ends for allowing me to add a piece to my patchwork existence. I would like to remember a perfect life, but that is impossible. I realize that the perfection of the universe was spoiled when man crawled from the seas, and more importantly, when he encountered more of his own kind. I realize that I cannot achieve perfection until I leave this world that I have loved with my whole heart. My stay here has been worthwhile.

Still I face regret. I have done my best to cheat it and keep its cloud from shading my sunset. It is inescapable. With these lines I



SILHOUETTE by Janice J. McKinney

hope to acknowledge its impact on my conscience, and in doing so, allow it to pass away before I do.

I fault no one but myself for the emptiness that stalks me in my old age. It is alone that I face it. I alone accept the responsibility of allowing it to remain empty. Somewhere there is the one who could have filled my regretful void. I hope she does not suffer on account of me. I should have tried harder to find her.

From young adulthood, as I began to feel and to understand that there was a need for her inside me, I suppressed it. I allowed life to happen to me in that sense, not seeking or seeing with hungry eyes, content to focus my appetite on other things. Always other things.

Here and now I investigate my inside thoughts and convey their

urgency. It is vital that I tell them now and expose them for what they are and what they do—burden me in my last hours. If I fail to write this now, then it will pass away with me and perhaps follow me wherever I go when I leave. I won't allow that to happen. So, hear my desperate words and listen to them if you will, because I wish no one to die and have such a weight buried with them.

Find her or him. Seek and do not give up on your search, for there must be a match for every person. We are created with a place inside us to fill. Other people are created with the ingredients to fill that space, and it is important to know that, when death approaches you, there is a soul mate by your side who will eventually follow you beyond humanity or one already

waiting for you there. I do not have this comfort. If I could live my years again, I would not make the same mistake. Today, as my once firm hold on life slips steadily from my grasp, I wish she were with me. All I have is the memory of experience.

So it is back to this that I now turn. I will roll myself more snugly into that quilt, and look at pieces around me and remember the sweetness of sewing them into place. My quilting is done. Do not allow yourself to leave a hole in yours. Do not allow the cold draft of regret to rob you of the comfort of fulfillment that old age should bring. Do not end up like me, but pity me neither, for I have finally faced my mistakes. Please learn from them and find someone to wrap up in life with you.



COUNTRY FENCE by Trevor J. Swanson

FATHER

by Teresa A. Lanier

He is an arid, desolate desert region,
 with sun scorched cracks that appear with rage.

He is a small yellow lemon,
 that first appears to be appetizing,
 but its taste is surprisingly sour.

He is a large, black magnet,
 that attracts evil and repels goodness.

He is the darkness before the dawn,
 and dispels quickly before the sunlight can reach him.

He is the past, present and the future—
 a constant presence of evil.

He is small, leather gloves
 that are lavished with holes,
 and the fingers cut out to leave one's hands cold.

He feeds off other people's happiness,
 and in return takes their own happiness away.

His dream is to live a life where golden treasures embellish him,
 but his congregation of faithful followers are bare.

He declares that he has changed and seeks love and forgiveness,
 but his invariable self seeks only to capture love,
 and not free his own love in replace.

He is a fancy glistening luxury car,
 but secretly knows it is a fraudulent imitation.

He is a scorching hot day,
 that slowly evaporates the strength from his surroundings,
 leaving everything dry, weak and worthless.

He is the heartless devil,
 the origin of evil,
 the constant opposition to God.



THE STORM by Misty A. Bateman

GARDEN OF STONE

by Stephen B. Holcombe

we plant our flowers in the garden of stone
leaving our loved ones here alone
we think of you in a time of need
fighting over your belongings with greed
although you're always around
it seems you can never be found
never a word from you
not even a sound
just brief thoughts of you and me
and how things used to be
that's why we plant our flowers in the garden of stone
to let you know we love you
and you're not alone

IN THE BEGINNING...

by Phillip J. Palmer

The small, middle-aged man advances to the first tee box like a prize fighter climbing into a ring. Although he has played many times before, he enjoys a fresh sense of beginning as his sharp eye is courted down the center of the huge green fairway that is his target. As he bends down to tee up his ball, he is pleased at the softness of the recently cut Bermuda grass against his knuckles and how readily the soil beneath it accepts the wooden peg. It is a glorious day for the game of golf. The man straightens to his full frame of a little over five feet just in time to notice a huge hawk swoop down to pluck a fish from an otherwise undisturbed pond to the right.

Like a skillful attack of this raptor, the ideal golf swing is the very definition of beauty, expressing rhythmic grace while at the

same time imparting murderous force. The club of choice for this golfer, as it has always been for his inaugural tee shot, is the hand-crafted persimmon driver given to him by his great-grandfather. This is such a magnificent instrument, with a brilliant red facial insert worn smooth in the center as a result of thousands of immaculate drives. The golfer's pre-shot routine begins with a few practice swings to arouse the 40-year-old muscles for what is about to happen.

With each practice swing the golfer becomes more and more at one with the precise balance that is the trademark of this, his favorite club.

It is now obvious that every golfer who was once in the clubhouse has now come outside to focus intently on this seemingly common man who is really quite diminutive. The hissing whispers from this excited group are easily heard from all around. The golfer moves forward revealing his personalized golf bag, the pearl white letters spelling out his name exposed to all, confirming their prediction. Yes, it is the finest expression of golf the world has ever seen in the person of Ben Hogan.

Addressing the golf ball with feet apart slightly more than shoulder width, he shuffles his toes briskly while waggling the clubhead with the determination and conviction of a world class athlete. He slowly begins to feel the shot coming, gathering energy from within and channeling the very forces of reality all around. His concentration intensifies more, burning deeply into the little white ball like the Texas sun high above. Instinctively, beautifully, with unyielding confidence, he draws the club back over his shoulder, left knee pointed inward, left arm straight, as close as one could come to mechanical perfection. With a violent hip turn to the left, the downswing has begun. His enormous built-up tension is now unleashed with a mighty slash. The ball tears through the sky, screaming toward its objective, the promises shining from every dimple, the whiteness of it symbolizing the purity of a straight shot rarely achieved by most, its uniformly round shape reminding us of the perfection that is so hard to achieve in golf as in life. For Ben Hogan, golf is life and everything apart from it is mere illusion.

WHO AM I?

by Phyllis E. Stevens

As I stand and observe the scene, I survey the dangers that I see. I view the mangled mass of twisted steel, the glass, the marks, the spots of blood. I know somewhere in this twisted heap, there is someone waiting just for me.

As I don my gloves and grab my bag, I hear a weak and muffled cry. I start to pull and break the mass. That's when I hear so loud and clear... "Please,... somebody,... Please help,... Help me."

At last, my patient I have found. The adrenaline pumping, my heart racing, I hurry to my patient's side. I take the pulse and pressure too. I count her breathing—one, two, three. I look for broken bones, abrasions, and cuts, as I reach for scissors, gauze, and tape..... Who am I?.....Who am I?

I am just one whose life is satisfied by helping those in pain and need. I am the ever humble, tough and tumble, first responder...E.M.T.

IMAGES OF LIFE

by Rina W. Tutt

Meaningful pictures of meaningless clouds,
meandering asunder.

Mounds of sand piled high in sand castles,
millions of tiny pieces.

Pictures of what we think we see,
reflecting at us in mirrors.

Deep in the soul, behind lying eyes,
where thoughts may be hidden.

There in the heart with a whispering word
truth is kept silent.

Taking for granted what we see is real
not really paying attention.

Here on the flesh where real is felt
but not on the lips is spoken,

We think it is love we feel to the touch
but we are unknowingly sadly
mistaken.

AND SO THEY DIE

by Dawn M. McDermott

They, the merry men, dance their dance until
they are told it is vain to be merry when war is imminent ...
and so they march.

They, the foolish wives, sing as they
wash until they are warned that singing is unholy ...
and so they cry.

They, the melodious birds chirp until
they are stoned by the children for their song ...
and so silence.

The happy sky is gray with tears
because the sun, screaming for peace, has burned it with its warmth.
Not even he, the light, can reach the hearts of the people ...
and so he hides.

The terrible tempest of war encroaches upon the people.
Fire vaults through the air, and even it, with its violent heat,
cannot warm the hearts of those who destroy happiness ...
and so they march.

A woman screams as she is told of a terrible battle
in which her husband fought valiantly, and so she should
be proud he gave his life for his country ...
and so they cry.

Bitter is the pain in the hearts
of the children, and in their stomachs,
for they have no one to bring food home ...
and so they work.

How can the nightingale's song be
heard all over the clamor of the artillery?
And so silence, but for the sound of war ...
and so it goes until ...

The clatter of the news spreads,
the marvelous victor is attained ...
and so they dance ... and so they sing ...
and so they chirp ... and so he shines ...
and so again it goes until the return ...

When people stop seeing people,
When hate is strong within the heart,
When the dominating force gains power, when bloodshed reigns again.
Once the victor, now challenged,
and so he hides ...
and so they die.

MUTT PROBES THE SANTA MYTH

by Merrill O. Cantrell

**"I never
knew they
wuz so
many
diffrunt
Sandys."**

"Golly, Aunt Emma!" Mutt cried out as they walked down the sidewalks of Dallas a week before Christmas. "I never knew they wuz so many diffrunt Sandys. Fat ones, skinny ones, tall ones, short ones, they's even a kid Sandy no bigger'n Warren. Gosh, I bet it shore gits crowded at the north pole."

"Well, now, sweetie (she never did call me Mutt like the others), my head isn't as young as it used to be, so let me think about that until we get home, then maybe I'll remember what my mother told me when I was a little girl about your age. Here's a drugstore, why don't we go inside and get a nice cup of hot chocolate?"

"I'd druther have ice cream."

"Ice cream? On a cold day like this?"

"Yes'm, my tongue got all sun-burned when I looked up at them tall buildin's with my mouth open."

"You little booger, I bound you Warren put you up to saying that."

"Yes'm. He said it would be funny, that you needed to laugh more. I 'spect that hot chocolate would taste real good about now."

She just smiled real big and told the lady in the pink dress with the buttons down the front and the little white collar to bring us two hot chocolates.



"Are you gonna tell me why they's so many Sandys now, Aunt Emma?"

She took me up beside her in the big armchair in front of the fireplace, then jabbed at the wood with a poker. Sparks jumped all around and some flew up the chimney, but when she finished the fire blazed up real pretty. We just sat there cozy, lookin' at it for a while.

"You see, sweetie, all those Santas we saw in town today are just people dressed up like Santa because they want to make people,

especially little children, feel good. You might call them Santa's helpers."

"How do they make people feel good, Auntie?"

"Do you remember those on the street had little black kettles?"

"Yes'm, and they jingled their bells too."

"That's right, people put money in those kettles. Then at Christmas time they take the money and buy toys for the poor children, sometimes clothes for their fathers and mothers and food so the poor families can have a good Christmas dinner. Don't you think that's a nice way to help Santa?"

"Yes'm, but don't you remember that one in the big store that knew my name and said he bet I'd been a good little boy. He said right out he 'spect I'd get that blue Flyer waggin' and a 'lectric train (I didn't see Aunt Emma leaning over Santa's ear while I was climbing up in his lap, and I'm sure he recognized the expensive clothes she wore as a good sign he could promise me almost anything). Seems like he'd just havta be the real Santa to know all 'bout me like that."

"That does seem amazing, but you must remember that Santa is magic and no one has ever, ever seen him. He won't come until everyone is asleep on Christmas Eve."

"Aunt Emma?"

"Yes, dear."

"If no one has ever seen Santa how do they know he wears a red suit and has whiskers?"

"You do find the most troublesome questions, don't you?"

She touched her forehead with her index finger and wriggled her nose three times as if conjuring up a magic spell.

"Well, according to my grandmother, who told my mother when she was a little girl, and my mother who told me when I was a little girl, it all happened a long, long time ago. One old wise woman who lived in the very middle of a

deep dark forest saw Santa."

"You see, once upon a time, Santa got sick while he was getting ready for Christmas. Well, now he could have gone into a town to see a doctor, but can you imagine what the people would say and do if Santa came to town and didn't have a lot of presents with him? Everybody would be unhappy and some people might not even like him after that."

"My goodness, wuz this way back in those once upon a time days, like in the fairy tales?"

"Not quite that far, but almost. Anyway, Santa found this old, old wise woman living in the forest all alone. She gave him herbs and tea that made him well again and he gave her a special wish every year at Christmas time if she would not tell about him."

"Did she wish for a blue Flyer waggin'?"

"No, sweetie, the first year she wished to be a young lady again, and it was so. The next year she

wished for a family so she would not be lonely, and it was so. The third year she wished for wisdom so she could always make her family happy, and that was so too."

"All this time she was just dying to tell someone her secret. After the third wish came true, she said, 'What need have I for more wishes?' and she rushed away to tell everyone what Santa looked like. That's how we know today that he has eyes that twinkle, a long white beard, a red suit and cap trimmed with fur and shiny black boots and belt."

"You know, Aunt Emma, I'll bet yo're just as wise as she wuz. You do know 'bout everything, don't you?"

Somehow I found myself up in her lap, being hugged up tight and kissed on the forehead. I had a couple a more questions about Sandy but they could jest wait, I wuzn't about to spoil this good feeling for anything!

LIFE'S RIVER

by Teresa A. Lanier

A broken branch floats gently in a stream.
Grinning quietly, the stream leads to a waterfall.
The journey now seems like a horrid dream.
My emotions scream out loudly trying to recall.

Twisting and turning, I try to stay afloat in raging rapids.
I scream for help, fearing the worst is ahead.
The passageway to calming waters is invalid.
Falling fiercely, the dark unseen future I dread.

My body is battered by the river's savage fist.
The river's laughter echoes like a thunderous drum.
It tries to take my sanity, I fight to resist.
The battle begins to slow, a survivor, I become.

Free from life's river's whirling, watery den,
I know my emotions will rise and fall again.



STILL LIFE OF PURITY by R. Christopher Frazier



HOME IN PROVIDENCE *by Lynnda F. Malory*

THE OLD BARN

by Julie A. Cude

There is an old barn now surrounded by weeds
The names have been changed on the land deeds.
A shed at the left with a corral out back
Was used for repairing and storing saddles and tack.
Lanterns, saws, ropes and pails
Hung on the walls by 10-penny nails.
Three horses, a cow and a few lazy hens
All had to share one large pen.
There was feeding, milking and other chores to be done
Once finished, nothing left but fun.
Playing hide and seek and jumping off rafters
The old barn came to life with children and laughter.
Oh, the smell of the wood and of fresh-cut hay
Forever a memory of my childhood days.

MARIA

by Paula L. Stovall

**She had
finally
said she
loved
him.**

The dim, smoky room made everything swim before his eyes. He shook himself to clear his head. He didn't know what time it was, after midnight maybe.

He poured himself a drink and drained the glass in one forceful swallow. He winced and coughed. He tried to tell himself that it was only the smoke that made his eyes water, nothing else, but he didn't quite convince himself. He poured another drink and looked down at the dark, amber whiskey. He was drunk, but it really didn't matter. Nothing mattered.

He set the glass down untouched this time and picked up the letter that lay beside the bottle. The light that penetrated into his dark corner cast an iridescent glow on the white envelope. He looked around the emptying barroom. Even though there were no German officers in the room, he still had to be careful. They had caught up with Maria, and he knew it

wouldn't be long before they caught up with him too.

He opened the envelope and unfolded the letter. The words were now smeared, but he knew them by heart. She had finally said she loved him.

She had been struggling to get Jews across the border to safety. It was risky, and somehow something had gone wrong, a leak. Anyway, all the Jews were captured by the Nazis, Maria along with them. He hated to think about what had happened to Maria. He couldn't bear it. The Germans were cruel people. They would do anything to get information. That was why it wasn't safe for him here anymore.

Now that Maria was gone, he didn't care what happened to himself. Let them come. Let them kill him, torture him, imprison him. He didn't care anymore. Life without Maria was unbearable.

He sighed and stood up. He



AGE OF INNOCENCE by Sheila K. Rosamond

didn't want to think about it anymore. He paid his check and left.

The cold air that greeted him as he opened the door helped to clear his head. Besides a few passing cars, he was the only one on the street and the sound of his lonely steps echoed off the building and died in the still night as the next step took its place.

He reached the flat he had shared with an elderly couple. They, too, were captured by the Nazis. Now, they were starving in a concentration camp, if they hadn't yet made that journey along the worn path to the gas chambers, or a worse fate.

It wasn't a very good neighborhood, but it had been hard to find housing in Amsterdam since the German invasion. He took what he could get. He stood there for a moment looking up at the decaying building. It seemed to have that same tired look of the Jews who had occupied its rooms. Now it was all but empty, with only a hollow remembrance of the laughing children who had once played ball along the walkway. And of Maria.

A tiny moth fluttered by him, barely touching his cheek with its feathery wings, drawn to the glowing light of the street lamp.

He looked up at the lamp with eyes wet with tears. He watched as the tiny body threw itself against the illuminated globe, without regard for its bruised body. It lived for the light, and it will go on living for it, until the morning comes and the light in the lamp dies—the brave moth along with it. In a way, he was like the tiny moth. He lived for the sight of Maria. Her love was his light, and like the moth, when the light had died, he had fluttered down to lie upon the sidewalk, to wait for the inevitable tread of feet upon his wings.

He shook his head and walked up the steps to his door. He fumbled for his keys, slipped it into the keyhole and turned the knob. The door creaked with age and loneliness.

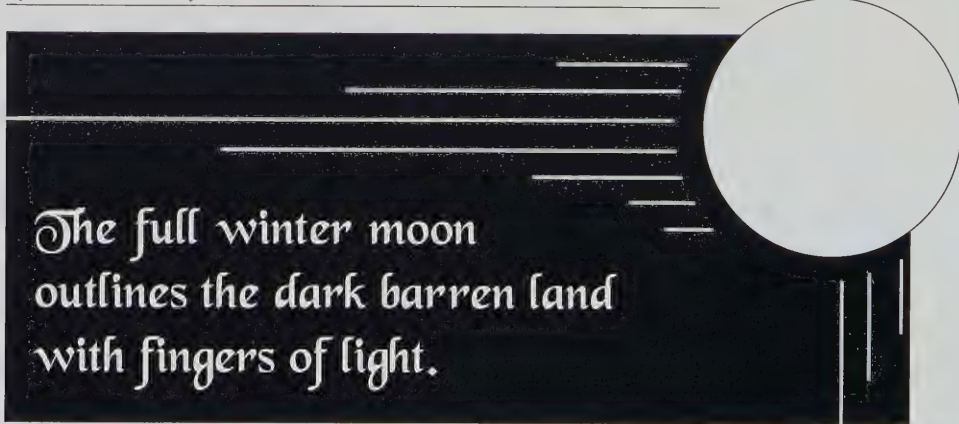
He could see her, even before he turned on the light, standing in the shadows of his shabby room. Two German officers stepped out from behind her and grabbed his arm.

"Maria," he whispered with painful longing. He would feel a dullness thudding in his chest—the tread of many feet upon his bruised and broken heart. As they led him away, he could see the crumbled letter on the floor, and her emotionless face staring after him.

**In a way,
he was
like the
tiny moth.
He lived
for the
sight of
Maria.**

MOON IN WINTER

by Elaine D. Graybill



**The full winter moon
outlines the dark barren land
with fingers of light.**

THE GAME

by Stephen C. Hall

Penny took a careful drink, then another. Each time she lowered her glass, most of the smooth, oily rum settled to the bottom, all but a thin waterfall, which hung on to the sides and gradually filtered down. "Good," she lied, as the burning fumes filled her head. Her mind started to go fuzzy as she reached for the glass again. She took another drink, gulping hard to fight back the urge to puke. A heady warmth flowed over her 110 pound frame. She flew.

"Hey, Jake! This is all right, man."

"Yeah, I told ya you'd like it."

"When are we goin' to the game?"

"We've got plenty of time, it's early yet."

"Man, do I feel out of it ..."

"Say, Penny ... You are one fine babe."

Penny pushed him away.

"Don't Jake, you know I don't do that." He gave her another glass of rum. She didn't want to drink it, but Jake was popular on campus; she was afraid to say no.

Jake was cute, too, and Penny felt almost irresistibly that she wanted to be close to him. Even though her mind told her to back off, her emotions welled up within her. Deep inside her heart she felt a warm glow, striving to fill her completely like the rum strove to fill her head.

If only he weren't so cute. The tall, strong body of an athlete, he had told her that he played football in high school. Sandy-haired, athletic and popular. Any girl on campus would have begged to go out with him. Well, almost any girl.

She took another drink at his prodding, and handed him the glass, now empty. By now she felt dizzy and giddy, "too much too fast" crossed her mind as he filled the glass, took a drink and pushed the glass back into her hand. Half the bottle was gone by now, and she wondered if she had drunk most of what was gone. Her mind

was too foggy to remember.

Penny's thoughts wandered to her first date with Jake, only a week before.

"First and ten on the 19 ..."

He had asked her to go to the game with him that Saturday night, and she had eagerly accepted.

"Second and nine ..."

When her first semester at school had begun, she was so lonely and nervous.

"Third and two at the 11 ..."

Making friends wasn't too hard as she slipped into college life, but making real friends ...

"What a touchdown! ... The oldest play in the book ..."

"I don't feel so great ..."

Her eyes blurred as the room spun.

She felt her mind go numb.

Penny faded out ...

... was stirred by something ...

Hands groping at her ... can't breathe ... get off ... hurting me ...

Dark ...

The next day she woke up cold.

I told him I don't do that.

ABANDONMENT

by Tamara K. Dodson

Slam! That was the sound I heard as he walked out of my life six years ago. It all started when my dad kept pressuring me to come live with him. At the confusing age of 13, I left my mother to live with my father. Basically, I thought life would be better if I lived with dad. After about three months, I was not happy and our relationship faltered. One day while arguing, I said the words that changed my life forever. I told him that I wanted to go back to Mom. He slammed the door in my face on the way out. He did not say that he loved me or good-bye. Abandonment, through my experience, is growing up without acknowledgment, remembering the past without hope of a future, and always loving without that love being returned.

My fourteenth birthday rolled around. A card was not sent, and a call was not received. Birthdays since then have become the same. I graduated with honors, and he never called to say congratulations. Now I am in college, and I am about to graduate again—still no call or letter. This is abandonment.

There is not a day that goes by without remembering the good times we had together. It hurts to realize that those days are over. I will never go motorcycle riding in the park with my dad, play touch football in the backyard or wash the car with my dad going behind me to clean up what I missed. To realize that the future no longer holds my dad is painful. This is abandonment.

The most unbearable of all is always loving without feeling the return of that love. I constantly feel that I am not important. I think, if he loves me, he will call or write. I think of my dad every day. What

is he doing? How are things going? Then, I also ask myself if he thinks of me. Does he wonder if I have turned out like all parents want their children to turn out? The last question remains. Does he love me? This is abandonment.

The door closed in my face with

a loud slam. It was the closing of a part of my life—the part with my dad. I will never stop peeping through the peep hole to the past. I will always remember the good times and I will always love my dad. He cannot see me though, for a peep hole is a one way tunnel.



RINGS by Ricky C. Martinez

**He cannot see me though,
for a peep hole is a one
way tunnel.**

TREE WONDERMENT

by Tom G. Akins

I shield my eyes with my hand flat,
looks like a salute, and tilt head
back to envision the height of you.
Your magnificent splendor is cause
for a time of reflection.

Like men, your hard outer crust
denies the tenderness and life
sustaining functions that make up
the heart of you. How long have
you pushed upward, twisting,
bending and stretching for that
unobtainable goal—the sun.

Upwardly you strive to reach the
highs, while below you clutch
more and more mother earth to
support your instinctive quest.
Your battle scars speak loud of
your journey, and are worn like
medals won from your past
struggles with man and nature.
Still you emerge with undaunted
spirit, always believing you will
some day reach your goal—the sun.

I see the stump of a limb lost to the
vain efforts of human foolishness.
Did it cause you pain? Does its
memory fill your mind with
thoughts of revenge? No, you just
put it behind you and move on
toward your highest goal—the sun.

Like a person of fashion you
change your attire for each occa-
sion, seasons to you. In the fall and
winter you shed your adornment
and get down to the business of
enduring the cold. I wonder, do
you ever fear becoming no more
than ashes in a forgotten fireplace
once spring hails its arrival? But
winter slips away and again you
don your best colors, festive, alive,
and provocative in the relentless
hope of winning your desired
bridegroom—the sun.

He comes and you bask in the
warmth of his presence, ever
trying to close the gap that sepa-
rates two lovers. He sends you
gifts of rain to quench your thirst.
You receive his attention, the rays,
the rain, the warmed air and you
conceive.

It is time to give back to the one
you love, and so with tears of joy
dropping as seeds to the ground
you begin a pregnancy in the
womb of mother earth and soon
present to the world a likeness of
yourself—

a son

a son

a son

a son.



WHITE OAK by Kevin R. Harris

